Population and Sustainability Network

Contribution to the International Development Committee Inquiry on
Post-2015 Development Goals

October 2012

Background

The Population and Sustainability Network PSN is an international network bringing together development, environment and reproductive health organisations, government departments and policy research organisations to clarify and increase awareness of the importance for sustainable development of both population and consumption factors.

Our mission is to increase the prominence of population dynamics within the agendas of governments, policy research bodies and NGOs (development and environment) in order to increase support for and investment in voluntary family planning and reproductive health services that respect and protect rights as part of existing development priorities, including maternal health (MDG 5) and the protection of the environment (MDG 7), and emerging priorities, such as climate change and fragile states.

PSN aims:

- **To highlight the impacts of unsustainable population increase** on economic development, poverty alleviation and the natural environment, work to remove barriers that inhibit discussion and action on population matters and promote greater awareness of the importance of population planning among policy makers, media and the general public.

- **To promote the adequate provision of reproductive healthcare facilities and education** for the 215 million women and their partners in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy but do not have access to modern contraceptives, often because of non-availability of family planning services.

- **To encourage better understanding** of the problems caused by unsustainable consumption (particularly in the rich minority world) - especially as they relate to climate change, pressure on finite resources and biodiversity.

PSN endorses the separate contribution to this consultation made by the Beyond 2015 global civil society campaign; this document is therefore short, focusing on a few key points.
Lessons learned from the adoption of the International Development Targets and the Millennium Development Goals: in particular how effective has the MDG process been to date

1. The key benefit of the MDGs was the focus they brought to the international development agenda; by formulating clear goals, key priorities were identified, which led to funding of specific programmes to address these goals. They were articulated clearly in simple language, and the global consensus they represented meant that a shared understanding of international development priorities translated into consistency among donors and key governmental and non-governmental agencies in terms of priority actions.

The key drawbacks to the approach included the following:

2. **Lack of a human rights approach** meant that there was no systematic way of ensuring that programmes respected and protected human rights. Such an approach would have addressed key points related to equity, gender, marginalized groups, etc.

3. **The absence of sexual and reproductive health and rights** from the MDGs was a significant omission; access to family planning and other reproductive health services is crucial for enabling women to become pregnant by choice and not by chance, and also for reducing maternal morbidity and mortality due to unplanned pregnancy as well as for advancing gender equality.\(^1\)\(^2\) The subsequent identification in 2007 of Target 5B – ensuring universal access to reproductive health – partially addressed this issue, but only partially; it is essential that this issue is a core element of any post-2015 development framework. This is particularly important, since efforts to monitor progress on achieving MDG 5, which aimed at improving maternal health, has shown it to be one of the most off-track goals. The UNDP 2012 MDG Progress report notes that the international community is a long way from achieving MDG 5. An estimated 287,000 maternal deaths took place in 2010, and since the 1990s progress has slowed in increasing contraceptive use, with unmet need for family planning remaining persistently high in some of the poorest regions of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa.\(^3\)

4. Likewise, **population dynamics were entirely missing from the MDG framework**.\(^4\) This meant that issues including population growth, urbanization,

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\(^4\) This was recognized by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General (2012). Paragraph 19 states: “The MDGs also did not adequately address issues of productive employment, violence against women, social protection, inequalities, social exclusion, biodiversity, persistent malnutrition and increase in non-communicable diseases, reproductive health and complexities related to demographic dynamics, [emphasis ours] peace and security, governance,
migration, etc were not taken into account, despite evidence that confirms that rapid population growth undermines poverty elimination efforts, and compounds difficulties faced by developing country efforts to feed, clothe, house and educate their populations. For example, in some countries with rapid population growth, thousands of additional teachers are required each year to keep class sizes constant. Yet we know that, where high quality, voluntary family planning services that respect and protect rights are available, women seek them out, and fertility can be reduced.

Several important and emerging development issues, including climate change, food and water security, fragile states, environmental degradation etc are all affected by population dynamics; it is important that any post 2015 development framework explicitly takes these factors into account. Furthermore, there are an estimated 222 million women in developing countries with an unmet need for modern contraception. These are women of reproductive age who are sexually active and wish to avoid pregnancy but are not using a modern contraceptive method. Addressing the vast unmet need that exists for modern contraception in developing countries offers considerable scope to advance progress towards, and reduce the costs of achieving, development goals, simply through the prevention of unplanned pregnancies and subsequent reductions in population growth. For this reason it is estimated that for every dollar spent in family planning, between 2 and 6 US dollars can be saved in interventions aimed at achieving other development goals.

How should the ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ be established following Rio +20 relate to the ‘Development Goals’ being considered by the High-Level Panel?

5. The MDGs have demonstrated that a global framework is feasible and useful. But it is critically important that there be one overriding framework for international development, which is comprehensive and addresses the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development. For this reason, it is vital that the post 2015 framework integrates other on-going international processes, the most significant of which are:

- Post MDG Framework
- The development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; the development of which was a commitment of the June 2012 Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development)

the rule of law and human rights. Neither did the MDG framework account for vulnerability to natural hazards and other external shocks, which have caused setbacks in MDG achievement.”


6. The potential impact of a post 2015 framework will be fatally flawed if there are competing frameworks alongside it as a major advantage of such a framework – a universally agreed and applicable concept for sustainable development, guiding funding and programming priorities, would be lost. Ideally the framework should act as a rallying cry to mobilize support for international development. UK Government leadership for this is crucial, including unwavering commitment to securing 0.7% Gross National Income (GNI) for Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The coverage of future goals: should they be for developing countries only or should progress be monitored in all countries?

7. Any post 2015 framework, if it is to maximize its potential to generate lasting change, must be global in scope, and allowing for contextualised national targets for both developed and developing countries. It should be guided by the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, reflecting the responsibilities of the global North to address overconsumption as well as meet commitments to supporting developed countries to overcome environmental problems and promote environmental sustainability, as well as supporting efforts to achieve wider development goals.

8. The scope should encompass areas where progress has been slowest and most uneven, including gender equality, maternal and child health and environmental sustainability, as well as important and emerging international development priorities including climate change, population dynamics, food and water security, and fragile states.

The process: are the right voices being heard? What are the opportunities for and constraints to global consensus?

9. The development of the framework should include a broad and inclusive process of consultation with full stakeholder engagement. Such a participatory approach must ensure Southern ownership thorough the involvement of national governments and civil society groups, particularly those representing marginalized groups including the poor, women and youth. The success of the framework will be tied to the extent to which it is not a top-down, Northern driven agenda or perceived as such.

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9 This recommendation relating to ICPD is supported by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General (2012) which recognizes the 20-year review of the ICPD Programme Action as one of the inter-governmental processes that will help identify key priorities for the post-2015 UN development agenda.
Targets: was the MDG ‘target-based’ approach a success? Should it be retained? How should progress be measured?

10. While the targets identified under each MDG helped to specify key priority issues within them, in practice, they became the focus of each goal, because issues that were not identified within the targets were not prioritized for funding, and were therefore seen as being less important. Quickly it became clear that programmes that were unlikely to be able to show a direct contribution to an MDG target would not be funded, even if they had the potential to make a critically important contribution to the MDG goal. This must not happen in the successor framework. An example of this was the target to improve the enrolment of girls in primary school, and there has been significant progress in achieving this target. Yet, according to UNESCO, gender parity in enrolment in secondary education has not increased at the same rate and in Sub-Saharan Africa gender disparities actually increased in secondary education actually increased between 1999 and 2007. This means that, in MDG terms, we have a success story here, but is that a true reflection of progress towards achieving universal education?

11. If the approach includes targets and indicators, which can be valuable, it is critical that they are broader than those adopted for the MDGs, and that the framework deploys them in ways that avoid the narrowing and distorting effect of targets and indicators seen in MDG framework.

12. The emphasis on measuring progress is valuable, because it encourages the process of identifying and replicating successful approaches. However, it is important that there be freedom to identify different ways of measuring progress, including qualitative as well as quantitative indicators; an emphasis on numerical targets can lead to an abandonment of efforts to reach rural or marginalized people, because the per capita costs of so doing are often so much higher. It is important that social equity factors be explicitly built into the monitoring and evaluation system adopted for the new framework.

Financing global goals: are new mechanisms needed?

13. Ideally, form should follow function; there is little appetite for a new mechanism that will require its own bureaucracy, and is likely to duplicate the function of existing mechanisms, but it may be pointless to decide this point before the framework is fully developed. In any case, the most important element about whatever mechanism is adopted isn’t the form it takes; it’s the extent to which access to funding is available to non-governmental as well as governmental organizations and programmes, including relatively small and medium-sized civil society organizations which have

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The role of the private sector and other non-state organisations

14. It is important that the framework harness the energies, skills and competencies of all sectors, including civil society organizations, and the private sector. However, it is also important to recognize that, if the new framework is to succeed, it will place a value on reaching the poorest, most marginalized women, men and young people who have yet to benefit from international development efforts. These people are always the hardest, and most expensive to reach, per capita, and are least likely to benefit if an emphasis on “sustainability” in the financial sense means that programmes must build in some element of cost recovery – services that reach the poorest of the poor are likely to require to be subsidized in ways that render the provision of such services unattractive to the private sector.

Timescale: what period should the new framework cover? Was the 15-year timescale for the MDGs right?

15. A 15-year timescale is about right, balancing a long-enough period for stable priority-setting with a short-enough period to be ambitious in scale and scope, provided that the framework is flexible enough to encompass emerging global development priorities as they manifest themselves.

The content of future goals: what would be a good set of global goals? What continuity should there be with the MDGs, and how should the unfulfilled MDGs be taken forward?

The future agenda should learn from the clarity of the MDGs, but also address the shortcomings of that framework. Key elements would include:

16. Ensuring sufficient focus on the social pillar of sustainable development and emphasizing the importance of a human rights-based approach to development with programmes that explicitly respect and protect rights.

17. Include neglected issues and perspectives, such as gender equality and health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and population dynamics. We endorse the recognition of UN Post 2015 Task Team report\(^4\) that women’s empowerment, universal access to quality health care, and management of demographic dynamics are ‘development enablers’.

18. Avoid a narrow focus on development that is predicated on a model that presupposes the sustainability of continuous economic growth. Instead, the model
should take a broad view of human development, including social dimensions with human rights at the centre of the approach.

19. The approach should **address social inequalities and the drivers of poverty**, placing inequalities and rights at the heart of the approach with a focus on the most marginalized groups. We therefore welcome the approach of the UN Post 2015 Task Team report⁴ that sets human rights and equality, as well as sustainability, as three fundamental principles providing for the foundation of the agenda.

20. **Mainstream gender equity and equality** into all goals, including gender sensitive targets and indicators, if that approach is maintained. Data collection should be disaggregated by sex, population dynamics etc.¹¹

21. **Focus on both sexual and reproductive health and rights** and the importance of an overall goal on health; and **population dynamics, including population growth, migration, urbanization**, etc. Whether or not the framework identifies targets and indicators, these factors must be included in monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms. PSN endorses the UNDESA and UNFPA approach to this issue¹²:

   “Population issues should be an integral part of the post-2015 development agenda from a two-pronged perspective: a) evolving population dynamics, including changing population structures and distributions, as they have tremendous bearing on macro social and economic development processes and outcomes, and b) access to reproductive health and protection of reproductive rights as they represent a critical challenge for achieving a dignifying human development and well-being for all. While the first set of issues i.e., population dynamics and changing demographic structures can be construed largely as cross-cutting, enabling factors for post-2015 development goals, the second set of issues i.e., access to quality reproductive health services and protection of reproductive rights should be included in and monitored through clear development goal and target frameworks.” (Page 6)

   PSN also endorses the UN Post 2015 Task Team report⁴ recommendation that: -

   “Targets should take proper account of population dynamics and different demographic structures across countries and regions and within countries. The clearest expression of these is the changing weights of youth and older persons in societies; different rates of fertility, morbidity and mortality; and urbanization rates. A combination of absolute and relative targets will be needed for an all-inclusive development agenda that takes shifting demographics into account.” (Paragraph 115)

22. The framework must embrace **a holistic approach to sustainable development, with sufficient attention to each of the social, economic and environmental**

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¹¹ We would like to highlight the following useful resource on this issue; Gender and Development Network (2012) *Gender equality and the post-2015 framework*, London; Gender and Development Network.

pillars. It must recognize the interconnections between people, poverty reduction, health, natural resources and the environment.

23. The framework must explicitly ensure that human rights, gender equality, health and education are central to the agenda, and are explicitly identified as key to programme planning, monitoring and evaluation.